



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

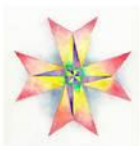
*A Complete Catechesis for Christian Living*

## Doctrinal Catechesis Session Mary Birmingham

### PRAYER



Agony in the Garden, El Greco, 1605



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name;  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread  
and forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us  
and lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil. Amen.



### Note to the Catechist

There may be more material than you can use in a one-hour session. Select and arrange accordingly. Use questions and material that is best suited for your particular group.



## Read the connecting statement

to draw the line between this week's liturgy and this chosen doctrinal theme.

This connecting statement is found in the **Breaking Open the Word** worksheet for this week.

### Catholic Faith, Life & Creed Version 2.0

© Mary Birmingham, 2011.  
All rights reserved.  
Version 2.0 reflects all recent revisions in  
the Roman Missal.

NIHIL OBSTAT  
Rev. Steven Olds  
Censor Liborum

IMPRIMATUR  
† Most Rev. John Noonan  
Bishop of Orlando

June 27, 2011

Editors: Bill Huebsch, Diana  
Macalintal, & Nick Wagner

Published cooperatively by  
TeamRCIA.com and  
PastoralPlanning.com.



## Sharing Human Experience

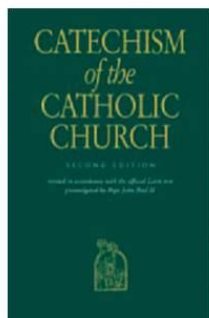
Catechist leads participants in a small group sharing. Break into small groups (three or four). Remind participants to make time for all in the group to respond to the questions. Catechist begins by introducing the topic, using these or similar words:

- ▶ Jesus invites us to turn our hearts and our minds to God and to detach from all that would distract us from our relationship with God.
- ▶ The only way we nurture our relationship with God is by having a conversation with him, by talking to him.
- ▶ We call that conversation prayer.
- ▶ Commitment to a daily prayer life helps us keep our lives on its path toward God.

Catechist continues with these questions:

- ▶ Considering your experience of Jesus in the Scriptures and in your life, what would you say Jesus teaches us about prayer?
- ▶ What have you learned about prayer from your own prayer life?

Catechist uses their responses to launch into a discussion about prayer.



## Sharing Catholic Doctrine

Drawn from the Catechism of the Catholic Church

Refer to articles 2559 and following.

- ▶ Prayer is a humble, faith-filled acknowledgement of God's existence.
- ▶ The one who prays affirms the lordship of God.
- ▶ The person who prays recognizes God's love for him or her.
- ▶ Prayer recognizes that God is the masterful Creator of the world and of humanity.
- ▶ Prayer is the reason for human existence.
- ▶ Prayer addresses the intrinsic longing for God that dwells in every human heart. Only in God does life have meaning.
- ▶ Human beings find their ultimate purpose and reason for existence when they turn to God in prayer.
- ▶ Prayer is the medium by which the human person and God enter into intimate,

covenant, lasting relationship.

- ▶ People give God thanks and praise through the medium of prayer.
- ▶ People seek forgiveness for sin and are granted forgiveness through the medium of prayer.
- ▶ People ask God for healing and they receive healing through the medium of prayer.
- ▶ They express hope, trust, faith and love for God through prayer.
- ▶ Prayer expresses the intimacy God desires with us. God desires nothing less than our hearts. God desires that we completely abandon our lives to his care.
- ▶ Prayer, even when prayed alone, is a public action because all prayer is joined to the prayer of the communion of saints, the saints in heaven and the saints on earth. When we pray we are in union with believers all over the world.
- ▶ Liturgical prayer is always communal.

A catechist shares a story from his or her own life (see appendix #1 for an example), then invite participants to respond to the following questions, first in dyads. Share insights in the wider group.

- ▶ Have you ever prayed for something and you felt that your prayers were not answered?
- ▶ What do you conclude about God from that experience? What do you conclude about prayer?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He was a human being. He was like us in every way except sin. The human Jesus learned to pray. As he grew in age, grace, and wisdom, so too did his intimate relationship with his Father. He taught us what it means to abandon one's life to the providential care of Almighty God.
- ▶ Mary, Jesus' mother, taught him how to pray. She, who treasured all of God's wondrous deeds in her heart, passed on those treasures to her precious child.
- ▶ When Jesus was 12 years old, he gave us insight into the source of his prayer. He said that he must be about his Father's business. Jesus' prayer was rooted in the relationship he shared as his Father's on, the intimate communion between the divine Father and divine Son, an intimacy he was eager to share with the human race he came to save.
- ▶ Jesus not only prayed alone and in quiet, but he prayed with others, in the synagogues and the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus showed us the importance of our common, liturgical prayer.
- ▶ Liturgical prayer strengthens our private prayer.
- ▶ The source of Jesus' power was prayer. The Scriptures give us a glimpse of Jesus constantly turning to God in prayer.
- ▶ Prayer and intimacy with his Father constituted the core of his existence.
- ▶ Jesus taught us how to pray by praying.
- ▶ He gave us the example of prayer, public prayer, quiet prayer, meditative prayer, and communal prayer. He prayed by himself, he prayed with friends, he prayed in the synagogues, in the Temple precincts, he prayed alone, and when in agony.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before every turning point in his ministry and before every important



event of his life.

- ▶ Jesus prayed before his own baptism. In Luke's gospel, a significant element of the story is Jesus at prayer.
- ▶ Jesus prayed not only at every significant event in his life, but at every turn in the lives of the fledgling community he called into existence.
- ▶ He prayed when he called the Twelve who would carry on the mission he inaugurated.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before Peter's "a-ha" confession of Jesus' lordship and Sonship.
- ▶ He prayed when he sent the disciples out to establish the kingdom.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before and during the Transfiguration.
- ▶ Jesus prayed that the disciples would remain strong in the face of what was to come.
- ▶ Jesus prayed so intensely that his sweat turned to blood before his Passion and death.
- ▶ Jesus' prayer was a sign of his humble submission to his Father's will. It empowered his ministry.
- ▶ Jesus left us a legacy of prayer.
- ▶ So important was prayer in the mind and heart of Jesus that he never missed an opportunity to teach his disciples how to pray or the importance of prayer.
- ▶ Ultimately, prayer empowers the lives of all disciples. Prayer empowers our lives.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups, and then share insights in the wider group.

- ▶ What does Jesus' pattern of prayer teach us about prayer in our own lives?
- ▶ In what way does this affirm your relationship with God and in what way does it challenge you to be a better disciple?
- ▶ In what way do you pray according to the example we have shared thus far?

## What Did Jesus Teach Us about Prayer?

Catechist continues:

- ▶ Jesus withdrew from the crowds and prayed in solitude.
- ▶ It is important that we carve out quiet time for prayer so we can hear the small, still voice of God communicating with us.
- ▶ Jesus was sympathetic with the human condition. He cared deeply about human suffering. Jesus experienced *extreme depth of sorrow and emotion* in the face of such suffering. He sympathized with human weakness and was eager to forgive and free people from their slavery to sin.
- ▶ It is important that our prayer include prayer for others, for the world, for those who suffer, for those who are in bondage to sin, for freedom from our own sins, for our participation in sins against others, social sin, and for those who find themselves on the margins of society.
- ▶ Jesus begins prayer by calling on his Father. He blesses and acknowledges him as the Lord of the Universe, as the one who reveals the mysteries of God's Kingdom to the poor in spirit, the lowly ones, and shuns those who think they have

privileged access.

- ▶ It is important that we not only center our prayer in Christ, but that we also call on God as Father, that we acknowledge him as our Father who treasures his children and gives them every good gift. It is further important that we find ourselves numbered among the lowly, that we do not “lord it over” those we deem less than ourselves. Prayer lays bare our grandiose self-perceptions.
- ▶ Jesus’ prayer includes complete submission to his Father’s will. Jesus always said “yes” to God. Just as Mary said “yes” when asked to be the Mother of God, so did her son say “yes” when he willingly embraced his Passion and death.
- ▶ It is important that we, too, abandon our lives to God’s will through prayer. It is important that we are willing to embrace the paschal mystery in our lives and say “yes” when God calls us to sacrifice our lives so others might live, to take up our cross and follow him, and thus participate in Christ’s ongoing work of redemption of the world.
- ▶ When Lazarus was dead for three days, Jesus prayed and thanked his Father for always hearing his prayer.
- ▶ It is important for us to remember that God always hears and answers our prayer. God’s ways are not our ways, so God does not always answer our prayer the way we want. But God always answers prayer. Thus, prayer should include praise, thanks, and heartfelt gratitude before the answer to prayer is given. Scripture tells us to “rejoice always!” even in the face of adversity.
- ▶ Jesus taught us that communion with the Giver of the Gift is more precious than the gift itself.
- ▶ Jesus taught us that prayer prevents us from giving in to temptation.
- ▶ We must pray often!

## **Jesus’ Parables Teach Us about Prayer**

- ▶ Three parables in the Gospel of Luke:
  1. The parable of the friend who keeps knocking at the door teaches us that prayer should include a sense of urgency.
  2. The parable of the widow teaches us that we should never cease praying and to pray with patient faith.
  3. The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” teaches us that we are to pray with humility.

## **More about prayer**

- ▶ Prayer is not simply the articulation of words, no matter how heart-felt and poetic they may be. Prayer is so much more.
- ▶ Prayer brings us into contact with the divine that resides within every one of us.
- ▶ Prayer makes us aware of the presence of God in all creation.
- ▶ Prayer is so much more than personal piety and devotion; prayer is personal development and growth.
- ▶ Prayer helps us recognize that God abides everywhere, in the eternal now, here in

this place, not just the place beyond.

- ▶ Prayer allows us to come into contact with or participate in the life of Christ who dwells within us all the time, every day, each minute, into perpetuity.
- ▶ Prayer helps us see, believe, embrace, comprehend the truth that God is right here, right now. God is not “out there.”
- ▶ Prayer is the art of becoming one with God, immersing ourselves in God’s life.
- ▶ The art of becoming one with God grows when one immerses himself or herself in sacred Scriptures.
- ▶ Prayer focuses our attention on who Christ is and why Christ died.
- ▶ Prayer immerses us in Christ’s own perspective of life and death. His perspective becomes our perspective.
- ▶ Prayer is God-consciousness; growth in the mystical life; the awareness that nary a word need be spoken because intimate union already takes place between God and God’s abode, the human heart.
- ▶ Prayer is the spoken or unspoken breath of God we inhale and exhale.
- ▶ St. Paul talked about prayer as participation in the life of Christ that already is taking place within us.
- ▶ Scriptures tell us to put on the mind of Christ, that is, to see the world the way Christ sees it, to see other people the way Christ sees them, to see situations and events the way Christ sees them. Seeing things this way necessarily requires commitment to biblical study since we can easily delude ourselves and put words and actions into Christ’s mind and heart that were never there in the first place.
- ▶ Each of us is called to the contemplative life. Most of us hear that, and we think it means we need to leave our lives and join a monastery, that it reflects going off somewhere, away from the hustle and bustle of life to in order meditate on the things of God.
- ▶ If that is what it means, then it follows that Jesus did not lead a contemplative life. Jesus did not leave the world to go off and pray alone all the time. He did periodically, but he also fed the hungry, healed the sick, taught the crowds, and promoted the Kingdom of God here and now. Jesus is the Master contemplative who teaches us how to follow suit.
- ▶ Contemplation means that we simply become attuned to the God who lives within as we live out our Christian life and mission.
- ▶ Contemplation is the art of continually abandoning our lives to God’s care—the joyful, the sorrowful, the meaningful, and the mundane.
- ▶ Prayer unites us with all people in the world; prayer leads to justice. If we want peace and hope to promote peace in the world, we must be peace-filled ourselves. If we want justice and hope to promote it in the world, we too must be just.
- ▶ Prayer unites us to God’s people and helps us see all human beings as equal, as brothers and sisters, as possessing the greatest human dignity. Prayer leads us to become advocates for that truth.
- ▶ Prayer leads us to an acute awareness of our Creator God and the creation he entrusted to us. When we live in God consciousness, pollution and abuse of the earth is simply inconceivable. An aware child of God can no more disregard or

abuse God's gift of creation than could a wife spit on the precious wedding ring given to her by her loving spouse.

- Prayer leads us to treasure the gifts God has given us and revel in their beauty.

## Types of Prayer

### Blessing and adoration

- Blessing is an expression of the encounter between God and human beings. We bless God because God has blessed us. We call upon the Holy Spirit to offer our blessing to God (CCC, 2626-2628).
- Adoration leads us to worship God because God is the Creator and we are the created and God is worthy of our praise and adoration. As Lord of the Universe, it is his rightful claim.
- Petition is the prayer in which we acknowledge our need for God. We acknowledge that we share a living, life-giving relationship.
  - Our first prayer of petition is to ask for forgiveness for our sins.
  - Second, we pray that the kingdom Jesus came to establish be realized in our midst and that we cooperate to bring that kingdom to fruition in our world.
  - We humbly pray for our needs.
- Intercession leads, as it did Jesus, to pray for the needs of the world. We too are called to intercede for the needs of the world and for ourselves.
  - All prayer should be both inward and outward centered and should include prayer for others. Prayer that is only "I" centered can be idolatrous. Prayer leads us out of ourselves and toward mission in the world.
- Thanksgiving grows deep within us. Every breath we draw, every event of our lives is cause for us to offer thanks to God.
  - The Eucharist is the ultimate prayer of thanks for the great work of salvation that continues in the Church.
  - It is God's will that we give him thanks and praise.



## Prayer Forms

There are various forms of prayer.

- ▶ Liturgical prayer is the prayer of the community, the community gathers to give God praise and worship.
- ▶ Contemplative prayer is quiet, communion with God. While there is a sense of the communal, all creation groans in prayer before the divine majesty, it can be prayed individually or in a group setting.
- ▶ Lectio Divina is praying with the Scriptures. We pray through the Scriptures and ask God to speak to us through them.
- ▶ Spontaneous prayer is prayer that is prayed in a group or alone. It is prayer that flows from a person's heart.
- ▶ Charismatic prayer can be prayed alone or most aptly in a communal setting. It is prayer that uses the gifts of the Spirit as described by St. Paul.
- ▶ Devotional prayer can be prayed alone or in a group. There is a special focus of this prayer such as the Rosary, devotions to particular saints, etc.
- ▶ Psalm prayer can be prayed alone or in a group setting especially when the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed, an ancient liturgy of the Church, the Church gathered at various hours of the day to give worship to God. Psalms use God's own words to pray. Every emotion of the human heart is expressed in the Psalms. If you want to begin a rich prayer life, begin by praying a Psalm every day.

Catechist invites a brief discussion in the wider group.

- ▶ What prayer forms just listed have you experienced?
- ▶ Those who have tried the various forms, would you be willing to share your experience of those forms with the group?
- ▶ What was it like to pray them?
- ▶ What did you glean from the experience?
- ▶ Was it beneficial for you?
- ▶ Would you recommend the experience to others?
- ▶ In what way, if any, was God present or did God speak to you through the prayer form you mentioned?



Title: The Prayer of Jesus (St John Passion - 3) Painter: [Jacek Andrzej Rossakiewicz](#) (b.1956.) Year: 1990. Public domain.



## Community Connections

Catechist continues:

- What are the implications of what we have shared today?

Catechist invites participants to relate what was shared today to some experience in their lives. Catechist shares an experience from his or her life and invites others to do the same.



Liturgy, Scripture, and doctrine challenge us to transform our lives so that we can go out and help transform the world.

Catechist informs the group of any parish activity taking place and makes arrangements for group participation. For example:

Prayer leads to action. Prayer takes us out of our self-centered need to make our own lives the center of the universe. One way to live what prayer accomplishes in us is to reach out to others around us.

We always have need of your service at our social concerns center and at Daily Bread where we feed poor people each and every day. However, this week we have another opportunity to serve as well. This week a young adult group is coming to the parish to present a sacred concert. Many senior citizens would love to come, but do not drive at night and thus are unable. We are looking for volunteers to drive our seniors to the event—people who are willing to come and be blessed by the music and the companionship of our elderly citizens, many whom are lonely and deserve an evening of prayer and song.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following challenges.

- ▶ What does today's session on prayer challenge in you?
- ▶ Examine your prayer life? What would you like to affirm? Where is growth needed?
- ▶ What one thing are you willing to commit to do this week in response to today's session on prayer?
- ▶ What one thing did you hear today that you want to be sure to remember—an awakening, an insight, or an affirmation?
- ▶ Which, if any, Spiritual Works of Mercy are you willing to commit to do in response to today's liturgy and session? (See Appendix, #3)
- ▶ What, if any, action are you willing to take in response to what we have shared today?

## Journal

Journal exercise for this week: Spend the week writing God a love letter—why do you love God? Why is he worthy of your praise? What has he done for you?



## Closing Prayer

Option 1: If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with Intercessions, Doxology (“Glory be to the Father...”), a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

Option 2: Pray an abbreviated form of the Luminous Mysteries of the Rosary. Here they are:

- ▶ Jesus was baptized in the Jordan River. The Holy Spirit came upon him and God called to him from the heavens and said, “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.” (Pray one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)
- ▶ The Wedding Feast at Cana. Mary told Jesus the wine had run out. “Do what he tells you,” said Mary. Jesus told her his time had not yet come. He turned the water in the jugs into the finest wine. Jesus’ power was made manifest. (Pray one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)
- ▶ Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of God. Jesus told the people that his kingdom was not of this world. He said, “Blessed are the lowly, the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the peacemakers...for such as these I came to establish my reign.” (Pray one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)
- ▶ Jesus was transfigured before them. His clothes became dazzling white. A voice from heaven said, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased, listen to him.” Jesus came to fulfill the Law and the Prophets. (Pray one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)
- ▶ Jesus instituted the Eucharist. Jesus took bread, blessed it: “Take and eat, this is my body.” Taking the wine: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood, shed for you.” (Pray one Hail Mary and one Glory be to the Father.)

End with intercessions and the Lord’s Prayer.

## Appendix

1. I prayed repeatedly that God would heal my child of schizophrenia. When I first received his diagnosis it was Christmas season in the mid-1990s. My sister and I were visiting one of the oldest cathedrals in the United States, the Cathedral in St. Augustine, Florida. Untold multitudes of prayers had gone up from that hallowed sanctuary, prayers that helped build a nation and see it through tumult, strife, war, freedom, democracy, and the birth of nation.

We knelt at the Christmas crib and the beautiful image of the Christ child, so peaceful, yet destined for glory through the humiliation of the cross, the child who lay peacefully in the hay, oblivious to the pain he would one day endure. All I could feel is betrayal. How could my beautiful child, the child I held in my arms, just as Mary held hers, be given such a lifetime sentence of pain?

I felt that God was deaf to my cries for help. “How could you give nothing but stones when I ask for bread?” In those early days, months and years I was so desperate for an answer to my prayer that it blinded me to see what God was doing in the midst of what found its way into our lives.

A turning point came when friends suggested that I be anointed with the sacrament of the sick. Our little community gathered and together we celebrated the sacrament. I sat in proxy for my child who could not be present. Slowly, I came to the realization that the one who needed healing was I. My child was in God’s hands. I needed the strength of the sacrament.

The situation began to change. My attitude changed, my perspective changed. For the first time, I began the long, slow process of letting go and trusting that God loved my child as much as I love him.

I cannot report even today that he is healed. This will be a life-long struggle. But I can report that he is in a far better place than he was before. I learned that God always answers prayer; God does not, however, succumb to my manipulations and demands to do things the way I want them done. God has big shoulders; he was able to withstand my anger, my bargaining, my chiding, and my pleadings: “If you really are God, then why don’t you heal my child?” God is not my sugar daddy. God is the Lord of my life who knows me best and loves me most. All God wants from me is my heart. When I remember that, I am at peace; when I forget it, my life is in chaos. I need prayer because I need God.

2. I just witnessed an amazing vignette on a hospital drama television show. A born-again Christian had a heart attack. He died on the table. When revived he was told he was dead for three minutes. The man panicked. He experienced no great light. He experienced nothing but a black hole. There was no one to beckon him into the light. Nothing. His faith was shattered. He concluded there was no God.



He became enraged and obnoxious. He hired a prostitute, saying that morality was no longer necessary. He was ugly to his wife and to everyone he met. He punched the Catholic chaplain in the nose! If it had not been so tragic, it was comical.

He shared how he had based his entire life on God's will for his life. When they lost their home, it was OK because God had a plan for his life; when he lost his job, it was OK because God had a plan for his life; when he and his wife could not get pregnant because he had a fertility problem, it was OK because they believed God had a plan for their lives. Now that there is no God, there is also no plan for his life.

The very wise nurse shared with him how she too had a crisis of faith. Yet, she ultimately came to the realization that God is within every human person. She said the devil could also be there. She was a nurse in Iraq. A beautiful young boy-soldier was shot in the chest and lay dying in her arms. As she looked at this 19-year-old boy, some mother's precious son, she could not believe that someone could look at someone so beautiful and shoot him right in the chest. Who could do such an evil thing? Perhaps there is no God after all. How can such evil exist? There must not be a God.

Then she heard how the young boy died. He ran into the building to save a five-year-old girl from sure death. He saved her life and in the process lost his own. Then the nurse said, "At that moment, I knew God exists." God exists in the magnanimous, miraculous, selfless acts humans are capable of doing—that someone so young could do something so selfless for another person is sure evidence in the existence of God. The young boy gave his life so a precious little five-year-old could be saved. That is miraculous; that is God.

The next scene has the wife walking into his hospital room to ask her husband if he was over his hissy fit; she simply had to know. Everything had changed. She just found out she was pregnant!

Sometimes God takes us into the dark night because the light is so brilliant it would blind us. I relate to the young man in this story, but my heart resonates with the wisdom of the nurse.

## Handout on Prayer

- ▶ Prayer is a humble, faith-filled acknowledgement of God's existence.
- ▶ The one who prays affirms the lordship of God.
- ▶ The person who prays recognizes God's love for him or her.
- ▶ Prayer recognizes that God is the masterful Creator of the world and of humanity.
- ▶ Prayer is the reason for human existence.
- ▶ Prayer addresses the intrinsic longing for God that dwells in every human heart. Only in God does life have meaning.
- ▶ Human beings find their ultimate purpose and reason for existence when they turn to God in prayer.
- ▶ Prayer is the medium by which the human person and God enter into intimate, covenant, lasting relationship.
- ▶ People give God thanks and praise through the medium of prayer.
- ▶ People seek forgiveness for sin and are granted forgiveness through the medium of prayer.
- ▶ People ask God for healing and they receive healing through the medium of prayer.
- ▶ They express hope, trust, faith and love for God through prayer.
- ▶ Prayer expresses the intimacy God desires with us. God desires nothing less than our hearts. God desires that we completely abandon our lives to his care.
- ▶ Prayer, even when prayed alone, is a public action because all prayer is joined to the prayer of the communion of saints, the saints in heaven and the saints on earth. When we pray we are in union with believers all over the world.
- ▶ Liturgical prayer is always communal.
- ▶ Jesus was fully human and fully divine. He was a human being. He was like us in every way except sin. The human Jesus learned to pray. As he grew in age, grace, and wisdom, so too did his intimate relationship with his Father. He taught us what it means to abandon one's life to the providential care of Almighty God.
- ▶ Mary, Jesus' mother, taught him how to pray. She, who treasured all of God's wondrous deeds in her heart, passed on those treasures to her precious child.
- ▶ When Jesus was 12 years old, he gave us insight into the source of his prayer. He said that he must be about his Father's business. Jesus' prayer was rooted in the relationship he shared as his Father's on, the intimate communion between the divine Father and divine Son, an intimacy he was eager to share with the human race he came to save.
- ▶ Jesus not only prayed alone and in quiet, but he prayed with others, in the synagogues and the Temple in Jerusalem. Jesus showed us the importance of our common, liturgical prayer.
- ▶ Liturgical prayer strengthens our private prayer.
- ▶ The source of Jesus' power was prayer. The Scriptures give us a glimpse of Jesus constantly turning to God in prayer.
- ▶ Prayer and intimacy with his Father constituted the core of his existence.
- ▶ Jesus taught us how to pray by praying.

- ▶ He gave us the example of prayer, public prayer, quiet prayer, meditative prayer, and communal prayer. He prayed by himself, he prayed with friends, he prayed in the synagogues, in the Temple precincts, he prayed alone, and when in agony.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before every turning point in his ministry and before every important event of his life.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before his own baptism. In Luke's gospel, a significant element of the story is Jesus at prayer.
- ▶ Jesus prayed not only at every significant event in his life, but at every turn in the lives of the fledgling community he called into existence.
- ▶ He prayed when he called the Twelve who would carry on the mission he inaugurated.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before Peter's "a-ha" confession of Jesus' lordship and Sonship.
- ▶ He prayed when he sent the disciples out to establish the kingdom.
- ▶ Jesus prayed before and during the Transfiguration.
- ▶ Jesus prayed that the disciples would remain strong in the face of what was to come.
- ▶ Jesus prayed so intensely that his sweat turned to blood before his Passion and death.
- ▶ Jesus' prayer was a sign of his humble submission to his Father's will. It empowered his ministry.
- ▶ Jesus left us a legacy of prayer.
- ▶ So important was prayer in the mind and heart of Jesus that he never missed an opportunity to teach his disciples how to pray or the importance of prayer.
- ▶ Ultimately, prayer empowers the lives of all disciples. Prayer empowers our lives.

### What Did Jesus Teach Us about Prayer?

- ▶ Jesus withdrew from the crowds and prayed in solitude.
- ▶ It is important that we carve out quiet time for prayer so we can hear the small, still voice of God communicating with us.
- ▶ Jesus was sympathetic with the human condition. He cared deeply about human suffering. Jesus experienced *extreme depth of sorrow and emotion* in the face of such suffering. He sympathized with human weakness and was eager to forgive and free people from their slavery to sin.
- ▶ It is important that our prayer include prayer for others, for the world, for those who suffer, for those who are in bondage to sin, for freedom from our own sins, for our participation in sins against others, social sin, and for those who find themselves on the margins of society.
- ▶ Jesus begins prayer by calling on his Father. He blesses and acknowledges him as the Lord of the Universe, as the one who reveals the mysteries of God's Kingdom to the poor in spirit, the lowly ones, and shuns those who think they have privileged access.
- ▶ It is important that we not only center our prayer in Christ, but that we also call on God as Father, that we acknowledge him as our Father who treasures his children and gives them every good gift. It is further important that we find

ourselves numbered among the lowly, that we do not “lord it over” those we deem less than ourselves. Prayer lays bare our grandiose self-perceptions.

- ▶ Jesus’ prayer includes complete submission to his Father’s will. Jesus always said “yes” to God. Just as Mary said “yes” when asked to be the Mother of God, so did her son say “yes” when he willingly embraced his Passion and death.
- ▶ It is important that we, too, abandon our lives to God’s will through prayer. It is important that we are willing to embrace the paschal mystery in our lives and say “yes” when God calls us to sacrifice our lives so others might live, to take up our cross and follow him, and thus participate in Christ’s ongoing work of redemption of the world.
- ▶ When Lazarus was dead for three days, Jesus prayed and thanked his Father for always hearing his prayer.
- ▶ It is important for us to remember that God always hears and answers our prayer. God’s ways are not our ways, so God does not always answer our prayer the way we want. But God always answers prayer. Thus, prayer should include praise, thanks, and heartfelt gratitude before the answer to prayer is given. Scripture tells us to “rejoice always!” even in the face of adversity.
- ▶ Jesus taught us that communion with the Giver of the Gift is more precious than the gift itself.
- ▶ Jesus taught us that prayer prevents us from giving in to temptation.
- ▶ We must pray often!

### **Jesus’ Parables Teach Us about Prayer**

- ▶ Three parables in the Gospel of Luke:
  4. The parable of the friend who keeps knocking at the door teaches us that prayer should include a sense of urgency.
  5. The parable of the widow teaches us that we should never cease praying and to pray with patient faith.
  6. The parable of the Pharisee and tax collector, “God be merciful to me a sinner,” teaches us that we are to pray with humility.

### **More about prayer**

- ▶ Prayer is not simply the articulation of words, no matter how heart-felt and poetic they may be. Prayer is so much more.
- ▶ Prayer brings us into contact with the divine that resides within every one of us.
- ▶ Prayer makes us aware of the presence of God in all creation.
- ▶ Prayer is so much more than personal piety and devotion; prayer is personal development and growth.
- ▶ Prayer helps us recognize that God abides everywhere, in the eternal now, here in this place, not just the place beyond.
- ▶ Prayer allows us to come into contact with or participate in the life of Christ who dwells within us all the time, every day, each minute, into perpetuity.
- ▶ Prayer helps us see, believe, embrace, comprehend the truth that God is right

here, right now. God is not “out there.”

- ▶ Prayer is the art of becoming one with God, immersing ourselves in God’s life.
- ▶ The art of becoming one with God grows when one immerses himself or herself in sacred Scriptures.
- ▶ Prayer focuses our attention on who Christ is and why Christ died.
- ▶ Prayer immerses us in Christ’s own perspective of life and death. His perspective becomes our perspective.
- ▶ Prayer is God-consciousness; growth in the mystical life; the awareness that many a word need be spoken because intimate union already takes place between God and God’s abode, the human heart.
- ▶ Prayer is the spoken or unspoken breath of God we inhale and exhale.
- ▶ St. Paul talked about prayer as participation in the life of Christ that already is taking place within us.
- ▶ Scriptures tell us to put on the mind of Christ, that is, to see the world the way Christ sees it, to see other people the way Christ sees them, to see situations and events the way Christ sees them. Seeing things this way necessarily requires commitment to biblical study since we can easily delude ourselves and put words and actions into Christ’s mind and heart that were never there in the first place.
- ▶ Each of us is called to the contemplative life. Most of us hear that, and we think it means we need to leave our lives and join a monastery, that it reflects going off somewhere, away from the hustle and bustle of life to in order meditate on the things of God.
- ▶ If that is what it means, then it follows that Jesus did not lead a contemplative life. Jesus did not leave the world to go off and pray alone all the time. He did periodically, but he also fed the hungry, healed the sick, taught the crowds, and promoted the Kingdom of God here and now. Jesus is the Master contemplative who teaches us how to follow suit.
- ▶ Contemplation means that we simply become attuned to the God who lives within as we live out our Christian life and mission.
- ▶ Contemplation is the art of continually abandoning our lives to God’s care—the joyful, the sorrowful, the meaningful, and the mundane.
- ▶ Prayer unites us with all people in the world; prayer leads to justice. If we want peace and hope to promote peace in the world, we must be peace-filled ourselves. If we want justice and hope to promote it in the world, we too must be just.
- ▶ Prayer unites us to God’s people and helps us see all human beings as equal, as brothers and sisters, as possessing the greatest human dignity. Prayer leads us to become advocates for that truth.
- ▶ Prayer leads us to an acute awareness of our Creator God and the creation he entrusted to us. When we live in God consciousness, pollution and abuse of the earth is simply inconceivable. An aware child of God can no more disregard or abuse God’s gift of creation than could a wife spit on the precious wedding ring given to her by her loving spouse.
- ▶ Prayer leads us to treasure the gifts God has given us and revel in their beauty.



## Types of Prayer

### Blessing and adoration

- Blessing is an expression of the encounter between God and human beings. We bless God because God has blessed us. We call upon the Holy Spirit to offer our blessing to God (CCC, 2626-2628).
- Adoration leads us to worship God because God is the Creator and we are the created and God is worthy of our praise and adoration. As Lord of the Universe, it is his rightful claim.
- Petition is the prayer in which we acknowledge our need for God. We acknowledge that we share a living, life-giving relationship.
  - Our first prayer of petition is to ask for forgiveness for our sins.
  - Second, we pray that the kingdom Jesus came to establish be realized in our midst and that we cooperate to bring that kingdom to fruition in our world. We humbly pray for our needs.
- Intercession leads, as it did Jesus, to pray for the needs of the world. We too are called to intercede for the needs of the world and for ourselves.
  - All prayer should be both inward and outward centered and should include prayer for others. Prayer that is only “I” centered can be idolatrous. Prayer leads us out of ourselves and toward mission in the world.
- Thanksgiving grows deep within us. Every breath we draw, every event of our lives is cause for us to offer thanks to God.
  - The Eucharist is the ultimate prayer of thanks for the great work of salvation that continues in the Church.
  - It is God’s will that we give him thanks and praise.

### Prayer Forms

There are various forms of prayer.

- ▶ Liturgical prayer is the prayer of the community, the community gathers to give God praise and worship.
- ▶ Contemplative prayer is quiet, communion with God. While there is a sense of the communal, all creation groans in prayer before the divine majesty, it can be prayed individually or in a group setting.
- ▶ Lectio Divina is praying with the Scriptures. We pray through the Scriptures and ask God to speak to us through them.
- ▶ Spontaneous prayer is prayer that is prayed in a group or alone. It is prayer that flows from a person’s heart.
- ▶ Charismatic prayer can be prayed alone or most aptly in a communal setting. It is prayer that uses the gifts of the Spirit as described by St. Paul.
- ▶ Devotional prayer can be prayed alone or in a group. There is a special focus of this prayer such as the Rosary, devotions to particular saints, etc.
- ▶ Psalm prayer can be prayed alone or in a group setting especially when the Liturgy of the Hours is prayed, an ancient liturgy of the Church, the Church gathered at various hours of the day to give worship to God. Psalms use God’s own words to pray. Every emotion of the human heart is expressed in the Psalms. If you want to begin a rich prayer life, begin by praying a Psalm every day.